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ABSTRACT

To appreciate the promise inherent in a wholesome collaborative approach to inservice teacher education, it is helpful to understand why it is necessary, how monolithic approaches to inservice education fall short of the mark, what obstacles already have been erected to make collaboration difficult, what problems must be solved to achieve successful collaboration, and what attitudes among collaborators will create the right environment for the collaborative effort. The practicing teacher is not likely to find most prevailing inservice systems (college courses, staff development programs, and teacher centers) adequate, and many examples show that inservice systems are less responsive to change than the society in which they exist. Collaboration as an alternative is faced with attitude problems and a lack of enthusiasm, as well as university policy of discouraging teacher organization participation. The benefits, however, are obvious; inservice education can only be made whole if a means is found to expand the limits of unilateral perception by the integration of all points of view. (DS)

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"Collaborating in In-service Education"

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COLLABORATING IN IN-SERVICE EDUCATION: A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

Myrna Cooper

SCOPE

To appreciate the promise inherent in a wholesome collaborative approach to in-service teacher education, it is helpful to understand why it is necessary, how monolithic approaches to in-service education fall short of the mark, what obstacles already have been erected to make collaboration difficult, what problems must be solved to achieve successful collaboration, and what attitudes among collaborators will create the right environment for the collaborative effort. That, broadly, is the scope of this paper.

The author fully recognizes and values the merits of the collaborative project generated at the Angelo Patri School and the reader will, no doubt, gain much knowledge and insight from the many chapters in this book which treat of that project specifically. Nevertheless, there are many important general aspects to the issue of in-service training and collaboration which require consideration, and an overview will, it is hoped, put the situation into perspective and aid those who are similarly engaged elsewhere.

THE NEED FOR IN-SERVICE

It is not inappropriate to suggest that the insufficiency of the pre-service teacher education makes the need for effective in-service teacher education compelling. Being a teacher is a process far more dynamic than becoming one and vastly different. To paraphrase Heraclitus: you never step into the same classroom twice.

To assimilate change, to confront the day to day "crisis" which is the classroom, to rejuvenate the forgotten, to create the never-learned, to systematize coping, to reduce groping are some of the reasons that bring the practicing teacher to one or the other of the existing in-service delivery systems.

The practicing teacher, however, is not likely to find most prevailing in-service systems adequate, appropriate, or relevant. Moreover, the current systems are unable to assimilate the philosophical, methodological, legal, environmental, and experimental changes which have occurred in education. Therefore, before turning to examine the organism of collaboration for in-service, it will be illuminating to look at the existing systems designed to yield a significant product for teachers who need or seek ongoing training to point up the deficiencies of these unilateral (and sometimes monolithic) structures and, thus, to be in a better position to evaluate the collaborative alternative.

TYPES OF DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND SHORTCOMINGS

Basically, there are three in-service delivery systems: college courses, staff development programs, and teacher centers as they are now constituted.

College courses are the most common type of in-service education. In addition to the more idealistic motive of self-improvement which brings teachers back to school, study at "approved" institutions of higher learning is used by teachers to earn advanced degrees, to fulfill state requirements for permanent certification and for increment credit leading to enhancement of income.

One problem with college courses is that the academician has his own bailiwick or special interest and tends to impose it on a course whose title may have led the unsuspecting credit seeker to anticipate something more pertinent to his needs. Often, this is because the instructor produces course content based upon that with which he is comfortable. In other words, the college does not deliver what it appears to have promised and the result for the practicing teacher as [sic] student is an experience neither needed nor desired.

Another difficulty is that, often, the content of the college course is antiquated and has little relationship to the real world of the pedagogue. Generally, this is because the curriculum has fallen behind the body of knowledge in the field or was developed to confront problems which are no longer central to the practitioner's task. In addition, individual courses compartmentalize the study of methods, content, child development, and learning theory while the need to synthesize these components in the classroom is precisely what has brought the teacher to the campus. The result is that college courses are rarely designed for or effective in improving the classroom teacher's ability to achieve maximum success in dealing with the actuality of daily life in the classroom.

The second major in-service delivery system is school district staff development. Such training is, largely, intended to support the programmatic needs of the system and its scope is, for the most part, determined by school administrators. Often, it deals with projects of the bandwagon variety (in this connection, the federal government which provides primarily short-term funding for projects is a culpable partner in the process). For example, the adoption of a new reading program may be directly preceded by the training and preparation of staff for the program (often, this species of program imposition takes place concurrent with the staff development component either because the funding might otherwise run out or because a school board election is in the offing and the district attempts to adopt an activist instructional posture).

The next school year may find the program materials relegated to storage as school administrators change or a new program becomes the vogue or no one is left on site to continue the program or the district resumes its futile search for a magic method or material which will make learning teacher-proof.

Where staff development training is not exclusively programmatic, it is likely to be reflective of a propensity among boards of education to react most favorably to a deficiency definition of in-service. It is closely linked to vague notions of teacher evaluation and accountability. Little thought is given by those who happen to be in authority to educational

measures which will build on the strengths which a teacher already possesses or give that teacher an additional repertoire of skills and broaden her perspective. Consequently, while in-service staff development by school districts may be occasionally effective in introducing new programs, the impact on teacher performance is dubious.

Teacher centers are a new in-service form which, because of their limited sponsorship, have not yet addressed themselves to the needs of the profession broadly. Generally, teacher centers are places outside the school where teachers come on a voluntary basis to share and exchange ideas, to experiment with curricula, and to develop materials. Their purpose is to improve the teacher's classroom performance and to, in turn, upgrade the quality of education through the support and enrichment derived from the center.

There are some indications that teacher centers have resulted in the introduction of more enriched programs, and creative teaching ideas. However, most participants have been teachers whose personal approach to teaching has been consistent with such innovations. In other words, there have been few converts due to teacher centers, and the centers have, almost uniformly, espoused a single point of view.

While the point of view has been a progressive one, it has not led to improvements in teaching which would not have occurred in any event. The appeal and effectiveness of teacher centers has been limited to relatively few teachers whose viewpoints were already compatible. More importantly, they have not served teachers who have more conventional approaches. The result is that teacher centers have had only a limited impact on teacher performance generally because the progressives have been talking only to themselves.

CURRENT SYSTEMS UNRESPONSIVE TO CHANGE

Still another way of understanding the deficiencies of in-service delivery systems, is to consider their capacity to function as responsive mechanisms for change in the educational order: whether this change be environmental (social and school conditions), methodological (new math, open classroom), theoretical (learning disability research, humanistic education) or experimental (impact of teacher expectations, interaction analysis).

Here are some fleshier examples:

(1) Bilingual education and mainstreaming of handicapped children: both are legislatively mandated obligations which have profoundly affected the classroom and the teacher. Common sense would indicate the need for intensive training of educational personnel prior to the implementation of programs of such significance. However, the regulations which explicate these policies seem to gloss over this important fundamental step, making only vague references to in-service teacher training. The possibility of program failure is thereby substantially increased. Ironically, teachers, not the legislators, will be blamed should things go wrong.

(2) Learning disability theory: During the period of initial training of most teachers, the body of knowledge now available in the area did not exist. Clearly, it should be a basic delivery responsibility of in-service education to make such theory available. After all, responsible estimates suggest that as many as one in five of the pupils in ordinary classrooms may be learning disabled. Yet, most teachers don't know much about the subject because research accumulated over more than a decade is only sparsely reflected in the few superficial offerings available to practicing teachers through in-service education. The delivery system has failed to generate the recognition of the subject's importance or to create meaningful and organic vehicles for the transfer of research into practice.

(3) Metrics: This nation is currently in the process of a massive shift to the metric system. It's happening before our eyes. Yet, there is no organized, substantial and universal effort within education to make teachers functional in metrics. If teachers are left to be metrically illiterate, what great shock wave will be set off when it is suddenly noticed ten years hence that Johnny can't measure. Where have all the in-service systems gone?

(4) Open classroom: This promising approach has had more attention because of innovative appeal than because of its inherent value in promoting learning. Had the in-service systems provided proper training and ongoing support to those wishing to use this approach, we might now have a view of it both less cynical and more reality-based.

These examples and innumerable others that each reader can undoubtedly call to mind reveal that in-service systems are less responsive than the society in which they exist. However, isn't an in-service system heavy with shortcomings still better than none at all? To the practicing teacher, whose pre-service preparation of "basic" courses and one-shot student teaching has made the entry into the classroom (generally without support or supportive personnel to help) an experience of frustration, stress, and lonely struggle as the neophyte battles to become a seasoned veteran, it is not helpful or terribly responsible to continue a reflexive set of approaches which at their best yield a salary increment and at their worst nurture cynicism and the feeling that low aspiration is, at least, easier to live with.

OBSTACLES TO COLLABORATION

The available literature on in-service collaboration (stemming generally from experience in performance-based teacher education--wherein groups "consorted" instead of collaborating) tends to devote itself largely to learned excursions into negotiations among parties, political motivation, niceties of governance formulas, and quasi-psychoanalytic pronouncements on what the participants must give in order to get as if the process were akin to marriage counseling or sex therapy. The impression one has after examining the various monographs by educators who have been sufficiently inspired (or funded) to give their views is that process is more important than purpose (cf. Jerome Bruner in New Society, 4/29/76, wherein he criticizes "the curious habit, in educational philosophers, of obliterating the distinction...

between what we wish to achieve and how to go about achieving it." As Bruner sees it applied by educational progressives "ends become means," but it would perhaps be more exact to suggest that means are the ends as is the case in progressivism and in the commentaries on collaborative or consortial teacher-training enterprises).

What has happened is that even before the blossom of collaboration has seen the sun of realization the field lies heavy with red flags and warning signals. Those who would make noble attempts to join together to make teachers more effective in their work are discouraged from the effort. If they do get involved, it is with a sense of foreboding and a conviction that failure is likely. Such attitudes are really the inventions of individuals and institutions who have a stake in failure, who are perpetuated in their activities by maintaining in education a state of frustration heretofore enjoyed only by Sisyphus in his eternal struggle to get the marble block up the hill.

The impact of these attitudes is that few really believe in collaboration out of fear that its success may mean the resolution of "convenient" educational difficulties and the attendant loss of sovereignty, control, authority, or just plain attention for one or the other of the inhabitants of the educational establishment. Clearly, then, individuals and groups involved with in-service collaboration will need to disregard the negativism that has preceded them to the scene. They will have to forego the luxury of treating the process as an exclusively political challenge with gain for one's side as a primary goal.

We do know what the real goal of collaboration is and that goal is consistent with the tenets of a democratic society which has as its theoretical foundation the fullest realization of the capacities and potentialities of each individual. In seeking to fashion a method of making teachers better able to realize their own abilities and transmit the fruits of this self-fulfillment to students in the form of an education which enables them to comprehend existence, function within complex social structures, and do so in a feeling and responsive way, we move in the mainstream of the best impulses our society has to offer.

Collaboration is, after all, a process of participatory democracy, an effort to achieve a parity of involvement in a practical area of education. It brings with it the assumption that such equity and community in a professional endeavor will yield a purer result, one which will not only have wider acceptance but also greater impact in the classroom.

TEACHER ORGANIZATIONS AS COLLABORATORS

Historically, the collaborative effort has been hampered by the tendency of S.E.D., L.E.A., and universities to exclude teacher organizations and teachers from joint efforts to develop in-service programs. The teacher has been denied equal partnership. School districts and universities have found it uncomfortable to face the fact that teachers are legitimized by their organization in the same way as a Dean of Education is legitimized by

being a dean within a specific institution, in the same way that a Deputy Superintendent for Instruction has no legitimacy except as an employed agent of a particular school district.

Additionally, elitism and paternalism (the first, a characteristic syndrome of institutions of higher education, the second, a not uncommon attitude on management and policy levels of school districts) have created serious obstacles to the acceptance of the practicing elementary or secondary school teacher as a partner worthy of equality in educational planning. Furthermore, teacher organizations, because they function as adversaries to management in negotiating on behalf of their members, have been regarded, by extension, as adversaries in efforts to improve the level of teacher preparation and in-service training.

Such a view defies history and logic. Unions, including teacher unions, have always made membership education an organic part of their mission. The improvement of the status of members has always been tied to training and education for advancement, for mobility, for better performance and morale on the job, and for personal fulfillment. From a practical point of view a teacher union benefits from the existence of a profession with high standards for entry and service, wherein its members are successful and productive because they are good at what they do, wherein they are well-treated and esteemed because of their accomplishments, and wherein opportunities for pecuniary and role enhancement through experience and further training are objectively available. Such "working" conditions make for a stable membership, one which requires less expense to service for negative reasons such as unsatisfactory ratings, one which is responsive to the organization which helped create the stable professional climate, and one which the organization can then service positively by placing its resources more and more into areas of professional concern. No teacher organization has a stake in failure.

In acting out its historical role, the teacher organization has firmly established itself as the appropriate source and "legitimizer" of the professional views of teachers. Teachers trust those who represent them more readily than they trust those who rate them. They identify more easily with their own organization (which has lived through their trials with them) than with a degree-granting institution whose faculty does not share their daily risks. Finally, teachers have confidence in their organization because they participate in its policy development and because they recognize that their own efforts in the classroom have been reflected in the way their organization values them as professionals.

Current developments, then, have brought bona fide collaboration closer. Enlightened administrators and academic institutions now appreciate the role of the teacher organization in professional matters and its capacity to generate teacher participation. They know that success depends on the teacher and that the teacher will, in turn, look to his organization to channel his involvement.

The new federal legislation on Teacher Centers which is designed to foster collaboration in in-service education will also have an important catalytic effect. It makes the teacher central to the Center in development and governance and thus functions as a response to and recognition of the new role and image which teacher unionism has given to teachers.

BENEFITS TO UNIVERSITY AND LEA

Having established the pertinence and centrality of teachers and their organization to in-service collaboration, one ought to identify how the Local Education Agency and the university benefit from their full involvement.

For the LEA, teacher-school district-college collaboration provides the best opportunity to resolve the classic training problem: the conflict between the needs of the system and the needs of the individual. The collaborative process is structurally capable of achieving not only a balance between these often opposite thrusts but of developing creative congruences between them so that both system and individual are simultaneously served.

Additionally, for each LEA, there will be an increased access through the higher education institution to what is happening elsewhere in education, for the college functions as the natural repository and conduit for developments in the field. Similarly, the interaction with the outside world will permit more accurate appreciation of what teachers accomplish locally and greater dissemination of these accomplishments through university publication and reporting. The LEA will, thus, achieve a reduction of the provincialism so inescapable in the isolation of an LEA from the larger currents of educational activity.

A most important benefit for an LEA will be the opportunity to free the district structure from the pernicious and bureaucratic business model under which most districts now labor. By gaining a more intellectual appreciation of the complexity of learning delivery and teacher-training through a collaborative exchange, the district may be freed from the shackles of the idea that education is a manufactured product wherein $2 of expenditures affects two points on achievement test scores. Once liberated, education may again be child-learning centered rather than systems-centered.

Ironically, the cost-effectiveness of the district may be enhanced by abandoning narrow and political cost-conscious practices, for a better in-service delivery will yield a better long-range knowledge delivery to children, a more stable staff wherein the investment in salary functions in constant rather than erratic relation to accomplishment, and a generally broader base of available options, offering, and experiments through generated funding of projects accruing to the collaborative process.

Colleges, too, have much to gain as well as give. Faced with declining enrollment, collaborative arrangements provide opportunities for the college to develop a student body at the source through in-service activities within the school district. By going into the field, higher education institutions open up a remarkable range of possibilities for service to the public as well as themselves. Such activity will permit them to exercise a profound

and continuous influence on the profession through training, education, experimentation, and publication. The school can become a true laboratory and the educational process a genuinely scientific activity wherein growth accompanies application, with testing and verification of learning hypotheses emerging from a dynamic collaboration with practitioners. Given an array of outcomes of value, the college, which will have gained in prestige by extending its influence into the classroom and by risking its social and philosophical convictions at the site of educational delivery, will achieve additional prestige by being able to demonstrate success.

The result will not only support the college economically through funding opportunities developed in collaboration and through the employment of its professional staff in shared in-service projects, but will also create for the college of education its best chance to function in a professional context comparable to the field of medicine wherein the institution provides the professional link that binds the on-going practice of the craft on the job, in field experimentation, in the laboratory, and in the training of pre-service, intern, and in-service personnel.

ROLE OF STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

It is appropriate at this point to briefly comment on the contribution that a State Department of Education should be expected to make to collaborative efforts within its jurisdiction, particularly in light of the general authority given to them to accept or reject Teacher Center proposals developed for federal funding under the earlier-mentioned new legislation.

SED's have a responsibility and concern for maintenance of quality instructional levels and the improvement of teacher capability through in-service education, but, too often, they have either been passive supporters of efforts to develop effective training approaches or else have functioned in a rigid bureaucratic fashion by mandating certain "standards" without particular regard for the impact of their mandates on schools, teachers, and children or sufficient consideration of the difficulties of implementation and execution which the mandates involve. Above all, they rarely put their money where their mandates are, and their judgmental propensities are more carnal than their physical capacities.

However, SED's can make several useful contributions consistent with their ostensible mission:

1) They can legitimize the in-service education collaboration;

2) They can encourage and fund helpful research in education;

3) They can document collaborative activities;

4) They can describe and research collaborative models;

5) They can disseminate information on models, educational research, accomplishments of collaboratively developed, in-service programs;

6) They can serve as a financial resource in some or all respects;

7) They can reward collaboration and, particularly, collaboration which succeeds.

Certainly such facilitating assistance in so significant an area as in-service is no more than it is reasonable to expect. Of course, inservice collaboration can succeed without bureaucratic assistance just as teachers often succeed without staff development programs or supportive supervisors.

HOW TO COLLABORATE

What emerges from this examination of in-service education modes and some of the undercurrents affecting in-service collaboration is the awareness that the key to success will most likely lie in the attitude of the collaborators toward themselves, each other, and the task at hand.

This author believes that participants should enter collaboration laughing, not scheming and offers a few suggestions here which may be helpful to those wishing to collaborate:

1. Recognize that you are so bad at trying to survive alone that the prospect of having company will, at least, be a consolation. In any case, three heads are better than one.

2. Identify the real enemy. It is those who want free public education to fail, not that "reactionary" school district or that "geriatric" college or that "greedy" teacher organization.

3. Credit your collaborator with the same commitment of the total resources of his group that you bring yourself.

4. Tell the truth about your self-interest so that everyone can relax.

5. Say what you hold most sacred and would rather not sacrifice. Offer to give something up as evidence of good faith.

6. Remember that the purpose of collaboration is teacher education and increased delivery to students, not funding or self-perpetuation of the participants.

7. Respect the other group's expertise as crucial to the success of the whole as much because it is unlike yours as for any reason (would you all seek to bring the same dish to the pot-luck supper?).

8. Realize that getting things done is far more satisfying than arguing and jockeying about who's <u>not</u> going to do what. The willingness is all.

9. Comprehend that parity within collaboration may yield equality of participation but should not result in sameness in the functions performed--the three heads are better because they're different.

10. Expect collaboration to create a structure for dealing with the in-service task but don't make promises to history that will haunt you--you may not change the face of education but you will clear up the acne.

WHY COLLABORATE?

The commitment to collaboration can yield a range of benefits for in-service education that can ultimately extend beyond the in-service training realm to affect all aspects of training, delivery, and evaluation.

As a creative mechanism, the collaborative structure will enable educators to be responsive to future needs and to accommodate modes of in-service yet to be in a framework free of the parochial encumbrance of one confining educational notion or philosophy.

It will enable all participants to gain an increment from the in-service experience making natural the recognition that teachers are not the only ones who can benefit from professional development.

It will permit the assimilation into the in-service domain of the significant reservoir of talent available beyond the three major participants (e.g., museums, child psychiatrists, art therapists, researchers), and, by placing the process within the mainstream of educational thought and development, can give a sense of continuity to education. For example, researchers can be harnessed to serve the requirements of the collaborative endeavor rather than their own interests.

The natural style of collaboration, as it is here envisaged, is one of openness and a policy of inclusion rather than exclusion. Anyone with a professional stake should be able to contribute. The pressure and influence of participants on each other creates perspective and sharpens focus on the challenges to be met. Interaction functions to assimilate conflict and transmute it into change-enabling resolution.

The unity of educators in collaboration will enhance the economic viability of in-service education and provide a vehicle for justifying in-service to government, the public, and those for whom the structure exists.

Many of you will recall the Japanese story, Rashomon, in which an investigation of a murder yields the not surprising but nevertheless fascinating discovery that each witness to an event perceives that event differently from every other witness. Reality becomes a function of the perceiver, an insight not unlike what we face in the variety of conceptions characteristic of current views of in-service education.

Each deliverer of in-service education (college, district, teacher) fails because of the inescapable handicap of seeing only a part of the challenge (and the opportunity), just as each witness to an event is limited by his inability to see that event in the totality, that is, the sum of the perceptions of the participants. In-service education can only be made whole if a means is found to expand the limits of unilateral perception by the integration of all points of view, a training "in the round" so to speak. That, dear reader, is what collaboration can do for you.